

**Supporting Human Rights and Democracy:
The U.S. Record 2005 - 2006**
East Asia and Pacific

Philippines

The Republic of the Philippines is a vibrant democracy with an elected president, an elected bicameral legislature, and a fractious but functioning multiparty system. The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were serious problems in some areas. Some elements of the security forces were allegedly responsible for extra-judicial killings, disappearances, torture, and arbitrary arrest and detention. The physical abuse of suspects and detainees remained a problem, as did police, prosecutorial, and judicial corruption.

United States Government efforts to promote human rights and democracy in the Philippines are numerous and broad-based. The Mission focuses on building respect for human rights in the security forces, promoting rule of law and transparent practices in government and the judiciary, and strengthening civil society.

Strengthening democracy is an essential Mission goal. Numerous programs at both the local and national level promote equity, transparency, and popular participation – all key factors in the healthy functioning of a democracy. In 2005, U.S. Government grants assisted Philippine NGOs in conducting voter education and in monitoring the August 8 elections in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). A follow-on grant continues to help boost the capacity of ARMM NGOs to conduct voter education. It also supports the electoral modernization programs of the Philippine Commission on Elections (COMELEC).

Increasing the quality of media reporting is also a Mission priority. The media is generally free and electronic and print media are numerous. However, reporting often lacks the journalistic standards to which the U.S. media adheres. In 2005, the Mission sent two Philippine journalists on a three-week reporting trip to the U.S. on the subject of religious freedom in a democracy. In addition, Mission sent three journalists from national newspapers to Afghanistan and Pakistan to report on U.S. reconstruction and relief efforts, which resulted in several articles on U.S. support for democracy and reconstruction in those countries. Mission also arranged

training sessions for Philippine journalists on accessing government information on the Internet, an activity that reporters who cover the Department of Foreign Affairs especially praised.

Support for NGOs and civil participation in the processes of government were the foci of the USG-funded Transparent and Accountable Governance (TAG) program. TAG works at the local and national levels to promote better governance, increase public participation through conferences and other public forums, and reduce opportunities for corruption. Among other activities at the national level during 2005, TAG supported implementation of the new procurement law by training NGO volunteers to observe procurements carried out by bids and awards committees. At the local level in Mindanao, TAG assisted 16 city governments to implement a range of anti-corruption and good governance reform. Between 2002 and the end of 2005, the TAG program assisted 87 municipalities in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) to reform and increase citizen participation in their budgeting and planning processes.

The USG-funded Rule of Law Effectiveness Program (ROLE) supports the Philippine Government's effort to make corruption a high risk, low reward activity. Assistance to the Office of the Ombudsman, which has responsibility for prosecuting graft and corruption by high-level government officials, included training in trial advocacy and investigation for the Office's prosecutors and field investigators and support for assessing selected Government agencies for their vulnerability to corruption.

To encourage respect for due process and anti-corruption among members of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and other law enforcement agencies, the Mission sent approximately 150 law enforcement officials to the International Law Enforcement Academy in Bangkok for courses with human rights, ethics, rule of law, and anti-corruption components. In addition, the Mission assisted in the training of senior executives from Philippine law enforcement agencies on ethics, human rights, jail management, and American law enforcement standards. The training included a visit to the FBI's National Academy in Virginia. A U.S. Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program also sent law enforcement officials to the United States for training.

Further, USG assistance helped to institutionalize Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) systems at various levels, increasing judicial transparency

and improving case management in the courts. At the community level, the Barangay Justice program worked in some 700 barangays (precincts) in the ARMM during 2005, enabling marginalized groups to gain access to the judicial system. As a result, community disputes are resolved more rapidly, greatly reducing caseloads in municipal courts. Support for ADR in the formal courts also led to the referral of 24,000 court cases to mediation during 2005, which was instrumental in preventing the country's court backlog from worsening.

Building respect for the rule of law is a key challenge in conflict-affected areas where armed separatist groups have clashed with Philippine Government troops and continue to solicit support from local communities. To strengthen the credibility of the national and local governments in these regions, the Mission helped the Philippine Government deliver much-needed public services to local communities in Mindanao and nearby Basilan and Jolo islands. Components of this program included the donation of medical equipment to local hospitals, the construction of wells to provide residents with access to safe drinking water, and providing solar dryers to help local farmers increase productivity and efficiency. Joint Military Exercise units and US military training teams incorporate civil affairs and humanitarian relief operations as part of each exercise and training event.

The Mission works to strengthen the Philippine Commission on Human Rights (CHR), an independent agency tasked to monitor and investigate alleged human rights abuses. A USG program provided CHR regional offices with computer software and other equipment in order to track cases and relay information to Manila more efficiently. The same software was available free of charge to Philippine NGOs that separately track human rights abuses such as disappearances and torture. Mission officers continue to coordinate closely with the CHR, which provides human rights training for members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the PNP, and vets officers for promotion.

The International Military Education and Training (IMET) program is an important component of USG efforts to professionalize the AFP. The IMET program strives to strengthen the AFP's professionalism, commitment to human rights, discipline, and technical expertise. IMET graduates populate top AFP ranks and actively promote close and professional U.S. and Philippine military-to-military relationships. During political turbulence in 2005, these senior leaders staunchly supported the constitutional process and

civilian control over the military and remained neutral. The AFP participates in the U.S. Defense Institute of International Legal Studies (DIILS) program at all officer levels in order to inculcate adherence to the rule of law. The Philippine Defense Reform (PDR), with funding from the USG, continued to work to make the AFP a more transparent, professional, and well-run institution. A major strategic benefit of the PDR is the reinforcement of civilian authority over the military strengthening the overall stability of the Government of the Philippines.

The Mission also strives to assist women and the disabled. One program for women provides education and skill-building activities for survivors of prostitution. Another project addresses the needs and concerns of women migrant workers, especially those who have become victims of trafficking or exploitation in Japan, and their Japanese-Filipino children. To support the quality of life for the disabled, USG funding goes towards a wheelchair project in Mindanao which manufactures and distributes standard, tricycle, basketball and even racing-style wheelchairs to needy recipients.

The Philippine Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Muslims comprise a significant religious minority in the Philippines, and historically they have been victims of societal prejudice by the Christian majority. Making use of programming tools such as the American Speaker program, the Mission organized numerous public conferences and gatherings throughout the year to promote interfaith dialogue among Filipinos. In 2005, Mission brought to the Philippines an American imam who discussed religious tolerance and diversity issues with large audiences of Muslims -- as well as Christians -- in Mindanao and elsewhere in the country. A separate USG project sent a group of 25 young people from Mindanao, a mix of Muslims and Christians, to the United States for a one-month program focused on conflict resolution and interfaith dialogue. Another program sent Muslim college students and young professionals to work as staff interns in the Philippine Congress.

In 2005, the Mission sent both Muslim and Christian leaders on International Visitors Programs to the United States, covering a wide range of topics to promote human rights and democracy, including grassroots activism, religion and the community, the role and responsibility of a free press, leadership development for Muslim women, accountability in government and business, community service and NGOs, and trafficking of women and children. The Philippine International Visitors Program Alumni Association

—the largest and most active organization of this type in the world, with approximately 500 members — has its own working group focusing on peace and Muslim-Christian relations.

Trafficking in persons (TIP) is a serious problem in the Philippines, which was a Tier Two Watch List country in 2005. The Mission has undertaken efforts to assist the Philippine Government and NGOs in the areas of prevention, protection, and enforcement. A USG grant strengthened efforts to provide assistance with TIP-related prosecutions to the Philippine Department of Justice. In 2005, the Philippines saw the first convictions of traffickers under a 2003 anti-trafficking law in a case conducted by prosecutors who had been trained by USG-funded programs. Other USG grants helped to provide preventive anti-trafficking education and assisted in the preparation of anti-TIP public information. One grant sought to combat child prostitution through better education and legislation and provided assistance to child victims. Another USG-funded program assists halfway houses in the Manila, Batangas, Sorsogon, Leyte, and Davao ports to assist victims of trafficking. The NGO running the program attempts to reunite victims with their families if possible and reintegrate them into mainstream society.

Mission efforts also focused on enhancing the capability of Philippine law enforcement officials in the fight against trafficking - an area in need of improvement. In 2005, the USG continued to provide training to the PNP, the National Bureau of Investigation, and various airport and airline security teams to help them detect trafficking activities and patterns. In addition, the USG established a Visa Security Unit of the Department of Homeland Security at post to concentrate criminal investigative assets to help review and secure the visa issuance process. This specialized unit will also be an asset in assisting with the ongoing document fraud training of the Philippine counterparts.

To strengthen worker rights, the USG continued a project to develop an early warning system to prevent possible deterioration of labor standards compliance. Several other projects focused on combating the worst forms of child labor.

ADDENDUM - List of USG-funded human rights and democracy programs of \$100,000 or more.

1. The Asia Foundation's Transparent Accountable Governance (TAG) project
2. The Asia Foundation's Legal Accountability and Dispute Resolution (LADR) project
3. The Gerry Roxas Foundation's Barangay Justice Service System Project (BJSS)
4. The International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) program for Advancing Reforms in Philippine Election Administration and Management
5. Management Systems International's (MSI) Rule of Law Effectiveness (ROLE) project.
6. The Coalition against Trafficking in the Philippines' (CATW-AP) project to combat trafficking in persons
7. The National Office of Mass Media's (NOMM) Trafficked! The Selling of our Women project
8. The American Center for International Labor Solidarity's (ACILS) Combating Trafficking of Women and Children in the Philippines Project
9. The Visayan Forum Foundation's (VFF) project to assist in the implementation of anti-TIP legislation
10. The End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT) program to increase awareness of child prostitution through public education and to enhance legislation combating it
11. The International Justice Mission's program (IJM) to assist in criminal investigative capabilities and to assist victims of trafficking

12. The Philippine Bureau of Investigation Violence Against Women and Children division's project (NBI-VAWCD) to purchase vehicles and office equipment to assist in the prosecution of child sex tourism offenders
13. The Institute for Training and Development's project to promote integration of the Madrasah (Islamic) educational system into the national mainstream
14. The Asia Foundation's MARTUS project, to ensure security of sensitive electronically transmitted and stored information used by human rights organizations and the Philippine Commission on Human Rights
15. Verite's project for Developing a Framework for Assessing Labor Rights Enforcement
16. World Vision International's Program Against the Worst Forms of Child Labor, specifically targeting children in hazardous occupations
17. The International Labor Organization's International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO-IPEC) to combat child labor through legislation and public awareness
18. Winrock International's program for the Community-Based Innovations to Reduce Child Labor through Education (CIRCLE)
19. The International Labor Organization's regional program for the Prevention and Reintegration of Children Involved in Armed Conflict
20. The Philippine Department of National Defense's program for the implementation of the Philippine Defense Reform (PDR)

Addendum

A Success Story in Human Rights and Democracy Promotion

Mission recognized the outstanding work of Maria Cecilia Flores-Oebanda, President of the Visayan Forum Foundation (VFF), in its 2005 TIP report.

The VFF was founded in 1991 to rescue victims of trafficking, especially young migrant workers. VFF now operates five halfway houses in port areas of Manila, Batangas, Sorsogon, Leyte and Davao, where it provides temporary shelter, counseling, and information to trafficking victims. At the Davao shelter alone, VFF serves 45 victims a week, mostly women and girls on their way to imagined jobs in Manila.

The VFF refers cases to the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group -- a branch of the Philippine National Police -- and works with them to facilitate investigations. Further, it works with the Department of Social Welfare and Development to repatriate and counsel victims, and to take measures to avoid re-trafficking.

Ms. Oebanda works closely with Mission staff, and with USG assistance she is running two programs to combat trafficking in persons. This example of public-private sector coordination is inspiring and something the Mission views as a best practice.